

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CENTRAL REFERENCE

28 November 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Director for Central Reference

SUBJECT: Recommended Modification of BR's NIS
Support Program

PROBLEM:

1. To modify the Biographic Register's NIS support program so as to assure a more realistic and useful product resulting from production effort within the capabilities of the Register.

BACKGROUND:

2. Because the increasingly heavy demands placed upon BR have begun to exceed the Register's capabilities, a continuing review of programs is maintained in order to realize, whenever possible, time/work savings in both processing and production. In this connection, a survey of BR's NIS support program strongly argues for review and modification of the program.

FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM:

3. The Biographic Register expends an estimated 15% of its effort in support of the NIS program. The major portion of this expenditure is devoted to the preparation of all biographic reports, prefaces, glossaries and indices contained in the Key Personalities Sections of the many NIS publications. The Register also produces lists of leading personalities for Chapter 1 (Brief) and brief biographic sketches for the various sections in Chapter 7 (Scientific).

4. With regard to preparation of the Key Personalities Sections,

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final decision regarding scheduling, size, and editing remain with OBI after consultation with BR.

SCHEDULES are constantly revised to accommodate BR's high-volume work load, imminent government changes, etc.

Present FORMAT calls for loose leaf volumes for about six major countries (e.g., USSR, Italy, China) with bi-annual updating; and standard bound volumes for other countries with scheduled re-issuances every four years.

SELECTION OF NAMES attempts to cover the entire spectrum -e.g., includes such types as writers, musicians, artists- but generally comprises key civilian and military figures.

NUMBER OF REPORTS in previous years has in some instances amounted to more than 100 for smaller countries and about 750 for the USSR. The most recent guide suggests that the large (loose leaf) publications "may contain hundreds of biographies" and the smaller ones 25 to 50.

TYPE OF REPORTS- comprehensive narratives running from three to seven pages.

ELAPSED PUBLICATION TIME is probably something in the neighborhood of one to two years- six months to one year each for the BR preparation and OBI processing periods.

DISCUSSION:

5. The Key Personalities publication by its present nature contradicts the definition of an NIS. The series purports to contain basic, relatively unchanging information, but a KP is anything but unchanging. Everytime, for instance, there is a change in government the pertinent KP immediately becomes outdated. Since this occurs so frequently, and since the machinery for updating a KP is currently so cumbersome, I imagine that the majority of existing KP's are out of date. During 1962, for instance, BR produced Biographic Bulletins on key people involved in 18 government changes, thereby outdated KP's which existed on 15 of those countries (no KP's on the remaining three countries).

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Secondly, the reports are too lengthy and comprehensive. I feel strongly that the use to which they are put far from justifies the work required in preparation- i.e., when a person in the field wants to know about someone, I am certain that in the great percentage of instances they are interested in familiarization-type data, not greatly-detailed, comprehensive information. If the latter is true, it makes far more sense to meet that relatively-infrequent need by preparing a requested comprehensive study rather than do it all the time. So, the reports are too outdated and unnecessarily long. And the machinery of production and updating too cumbersome to effectively counteract the two disadvantages. By the time BR has prepared the unnecessarily large number of reports, each of unnecessary length and detail, and by the time OBI's machinery has passed through the cycles of revision, editing and printing permanently-bound volumes, the KP is likely to be out-of-date again before dissemination (as indicated in para (4) above, anywhere from one to two years usually elapses between initiation and dissemination).

6. BR could do a better job in production and updating, produce a more current, meaningful and effective product- but only insofar as the biographic report itself is concerned. I feel rather strongly that we should press for and achieve meaningful streamlining of the existing OBI KP mechanism rather than attempt to sell ourselves as a substitute system. I have never been in the position of being able to measure the KP use factor in the field- e.g., is the "every ship at sea" theme a fact or a myth? I do not know how many posts or ships possess or use KP's and I would not attempt to guess- although I feel it's far less than normally estimated. Their value or lack of value notwithstanding, distribution must be rather great and I do not think we should attempt to get into that aspect of the business- nor of worrying about keying the KP's in with other NIS production. The machinery exists for production and dissemination. Let's push for making the product more effective and useable to the great market that potentially exists by streamlining the existing mechanism. To reiterate, BR can produce Biographic Bulletins on key people in government changes with which material it services the community. Through its direct lines of communication it services all Foreign Service posts- both on a routine or ad hoc basis. The military services abroad make little use of BR services. Automatic dissemination to the three services in Washington: Air 39 copies, Army 13 and Navy 10.

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7. In streamlining the mechanism BR has always felt strongly that KP format and content should be drastically changed. First, the form should be a loose leaf in the true sense of the word. (Sometime ago OBI decided to put out the larger countries in loose leaf form to permit partial updating every two years rather than four-year complete revisions. The first, and to date only loose leaf is the one on India which defeats the loose leaf purpose by backing-up reports and thus requiring re-typing of two when one requires re-writing. I would urge loose leaf volumes for all countries. Number of personalities should be greatly reduced: something like 25 for all countries with such exceptions as USSR, Communist China and possibly India running as high as 75. Length of reports should in all cases be limited to a page and a half- as is generally the case now. Such a scheme would assure derivation of maximum advantage from the loose leaf approach. Most important, it would permit practicable and meaningful updating- quite possibly as changes occur, if not according to scheduled shorter periods. Updated reports would be disseminated automatically and inserted into the loose leaf binder by the recipient. Nor need the "replaced" report be removed and destroyed by the recipient. Leaving reports on such "replaced" personalities in the KP would eventually build up a biographic information file on far more than the original 25; a file containing data on individuals of current significance, as well as those of background interest.

RECOMMENDATION:

8. That support provided the NIS Key Personalities program by the Office of Central Reference be reduced the necessary degree in order to a.) bring the effort required more in line with the capabilities of the Biographic Register and b.) produce a more meaningful and useful product; and that discussions be initiated with representatives of the Office of Basic Intelligence to work out the necessary details along the lines set-forth in paragraph (7) above.

CONCUR:


Chief, Biographic Register

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Assistant Director for Central Reference

Date

PAUL A. BOREL

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